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HAVANA MEDIA PLAY DOWN REPORTING ON PROBLEMS FACING ALLENDE

Cuban media have been notably circumspect in handling recent pessimistic statements by Chilean President Allende acknowledging the threat of civil war and implying that regime prospects in the March legislative election are not promising. While PRENSA LATINA correspondents in Santiago have been regularly filing reports to Havana on the political turmoil in Chile, relatively little of their material has found its way into the media. Havana's restrictive coverage of news from Santiago indicates that the regime is particularly anxious to avoid suggesting to domestic audiences that the political future of Cuba's closest ally in the hemisphere may be in doubt.

A series of Allende discourses during the past week on the serious political and economic problems facing his regime have been reported extensively by PRENSA LATINA's Santiago office in information dispatches to Havana but have been treated gingerly in Cuban media. For example, a five-hour talk by Allende on 18 January at a nationalized textile factory in Santiago, in which he engaged in self-criticism and painted a gloomy picture of the current Chilean scene, was covered in a Havana domestic broadcast the next day in a brief summary stressing that he had "reaffirmed that the Chilean process is irreversible." The summary contained no reflection of the Chilean President's assertions that the country was "on the verge of civil war" and that the situation was "very difficult and serious" or of his self-critical remarks.

On the 20th PRENSA LATINA carried a report of the same speech which included the abovementioned points but left out references to Cuba that had duly appeared in the reports of Allende's remarks filed by PRENSA LATINA's Santiago office to Havana two days earlier. Among these was a statement by Allende which affirmed Castro's revolutionary credentials while noting that the Cubans had not ousted the United States from Guantanamo. This was a reiteration of earlier Allende statements designed to persuade the Chilean ultraleft of the need for conciliation with the "class enemy" for the sake of survival of the revolution. Havana media also failed to report Allende's reference to Cuba as an "exemplary organization of the people"--a country where the populace "even had to suffer from rationing sugar"--and his prediction that "in eight or ten years Cuba will be the country with the highest social level in Latin America."

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THE MARCH ELECTIONS

While PRENSA LATINA summarized a 20 January Allende speech to high-ranking regime officials in which he sharply criticized the government bureaucracy, it ignored his gloomy comments on the March elections. PRENSA LATINA's Santiago office, in a lengthy summary of Allende's remarks, had reported to the home office that he "explained that the opposition considers it important to obtain a two-thirds majority and thus be able to constitutionally eliminate the president" and that

he asked what would happen if the UP won barely 33 percent of the vote and said that in this event there would be a political upheaval in the UP. We must be prepared for a political result of that sort.

On the 18th PRENSA LATINA reported an interview in which Allende observed that if his opponents obtained the necessary two-thirds legislative majority, they "would not hesitate a minute to remove me, and they would do so within the constitution and the law." Neither this interview nor the speech to government officials has been reported in any monitored Havana broadcasts to date.

AVOIDANCE OF COMMENT

Havana media have scrupulously refrained from commenting on Allende's seemingly dire political prospects--a reticence that may well stem from Castro's embarrassment last September over foreign press reports that he had privately criticized Allende and had alleged that the Chilean regime would have to abandon "bourgeois legality." While Castro strongly denied the reports, Cuban media may have been instructed to avoid comment that could be construed as meddling in Chilean internal affairs. In any event, a latest comment by PRENSA LATINA's Santiago correspondents in dispatches filed to Havana have not been disseminated in Cuban media.

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